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## FY80: Letting the Soviets Buy Superiority— With or Without SALT II

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(orig under SALT)

THE BROAD TRENDS in US and Soviet defense expenditures, and how these favor the USSR, were described in Bridget Gail's March *Journal* article. Table One shows how these expenditures will impact on the future balance of strategic forces.

The trends in this table merit close attention. They show how limited the US effort in strategic forces really is in terms of the US national budget, and that the FY80 defense budget will lead to only a very limited upward shift in the US effort. They also show that the USSR's expenditures on strategic forces have been two to three times those of the US for the past decade.

### The Soviets Have an Even Greater Lead Than CIA Data Show

The data in Table One, however, tell only part of the story:

- The expenditure estimates shown in Table One do not include civil defense, where the USSR spends at least ten to twenty times more than the US.

- Estimates of Soviet expenditures are soft, and probably low, in terms of Soviet command hardening and battle management capabilities. It is likely that if collection on these Soviet capabilities was better, or more efficiently exploited, the estimates would be significantly higher.

- These comparisons do not include Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation (RDT&E) on strategic forces. Total Soviet RDT&E is estimated to have exceeded that of the US by about 75% over the last five calendar years, and a far larger proportion of Soviet RDT&E is devoted to strategic forces than in the US. This is particularly significant because total Soviet RDT&E is estimated to have exceeded \$20-billion in 1978 (using the 1978 "dollars" estimated by CIA), and this is roughly equal to total Soviet expenditure on Soviet strategic forces. Accordingly, the total Soviet effort in strategic forces, including RDT&E, must be larger than the figures shown in Table One, and if RDT&E is included, Soviet expenditures on strategic forces may be three to four times higher than those of the US.

- Even if the CIA RDT&E figures were added, they would be "low" in that they are conservative in costing "possible" Soviet ABM, heavy bomber, and SSBN activity, and the estimates have evidently not yet been fully adjusted to reflect the evidence surfacing on the scale of Soviet SA-X-10 development, new Soviet strategic bombers and air defense fighters, and the USSR's four new "5th generations" intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

- The size and cost estimates of the Soviet anti-ballistic missile (ABM) and air defense forces are highly controversial. Although the debate is largely over Soviet RDT&E efforts (which are not included in the data on Table One), there are significant uncertainties in this area, and the estimates in the table are very conservative.

- The slight downward curve in the Soviet effort shown from 1978-80 will shift significantly upwards if the Soviets deploy new nuclear ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), new ICBMs, new bombers, or new strategic defenses. It could reflect a "pause" between weapons generation in each critical area.

- Soviet intercontinental attack forces constitute only about 40% of Soviet expenditures, vs. 60% for the US. However, the Soviet ICBM and sea-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) effort is far larger than that of the US because the US must spend so much to operate and maintain its aging B-52 bombers, and spent so much on the B-1. A much smaller proportion of Soviet expenditures goes to cancellations, the penalty for program delays, or to pay for shifts in force plans.

- The Soviet peripheral attack forces include Backfire bombers and submarine-launched cruise missile forces with significant strategic capabilities. Further, they include SS-20 forces which free Soviet ICBMs from target assignments against NATO and Peoples Republic of China (PRC) for use against the US, and which can be used as mobile ICBMs with 8,000 km range if their MIRVed warhead is replaced with a single warhead.

In short, regardless of the complex mix of historical causes and current motives, the USSR is overtaking the US in strategic forces, and will continue to, because it is spending far more to do so.

### The Defense You Pay For Is the Defense You Get

Even the rate at which the USSR achieves superiority is unlikely to be significantly affected by the US FY80 budget. It is a simple fact of life that the Soviets have spent far more than we have in the recent past, and there is every indication they will do so through the mid-1980s. Further, as will be discussed in a future issue, the SALT II treaty and its protocols will not constrain this trend, and there are good reasons to believe the US will not spend even as much as it projects in the FY80 budget.

### The Impact of the End of US Technological Superiority

Only a few chauvinists still assume that the US retains a major overall technological lead in strategic forces, or that the Soviet system cannot buy strategic weapons as efficiently as can the US. Unfortunately, 1980 is not 1970. The Soviets have paid the price of catching up with the US during the last decade. In the next decade, if they continue at anything like their current effort, they will overtake us—dramatically so.

Endless predictions heard during the 1960s and 1970s—that the Soviets would encounter technical production, or technology base problems that would inhibit the growth of their forces—have proved consistently wrong. As Albert Wohlstetter documented in his "Legends of the Strategic Arms Race," even middle-of-the-road intelligence predictions consistently underestimated the rate at which Soviet strategic technology would mature over the last twelve years. The Soviets have consistently been more efficient than we have predicted, not less.

It was the USSR, after all, which built the first practical thermonuclear weapon, the first ICBM and the first ABM. The USSR proved itself to be an innovator during the last two decades with a greatly inferior technical base. Now that it has technological near-parity, it is almost certain to show it can use its superior expenditures to reach a superior level of technology by the early 1980s.

### Superior Expenditures Mean Superior Forces

Accordingly, opponents of SALT should carefully consider whether they have any practical chance of changing these trends over the next six years. And change does not mean a ten to fifteen percent increase in US expenditures on strategic forces.

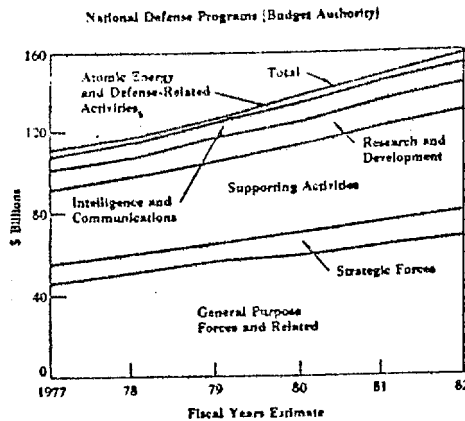
It would mean a rise of fifty to eighty percent to match the Soviet budget. It would mean a "brute force" effort in a society still deeply scarred by Vietnam, with domestic economic problems at least equal to those of the USSR, but whose national budget is far more subject to popular demands for economic redistribution.

It is nice to theorize about US willingness to compete if SALT II is not ratified; it is another thing to get anyone to pay for the reality. ■■■

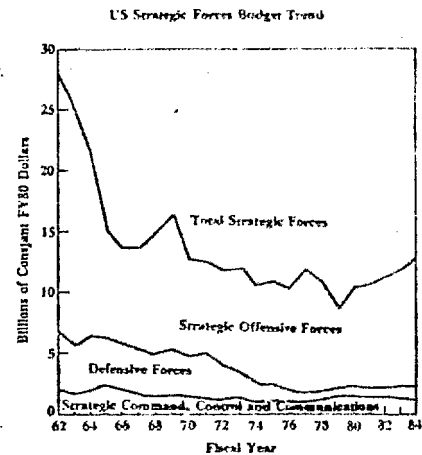
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## Table One Comparing the Trends in US and USSR Expenditures on Strategic Forces

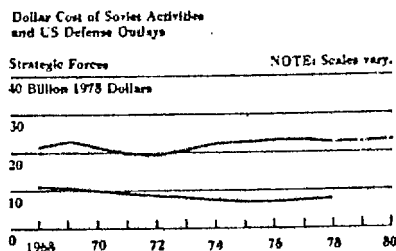
**The US: Still a Very  
Defense Effort, But a**



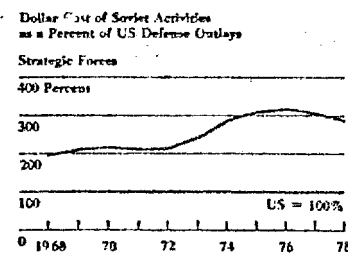
**Limited Part of the Total  
Slight Upward Trend**



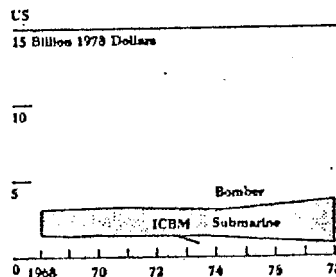
### Comparing the US and [Excludes Research



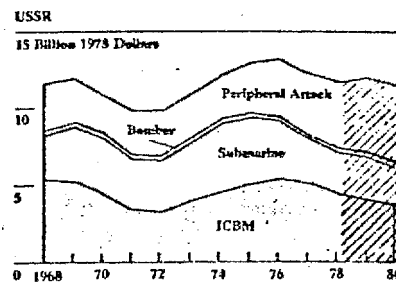
### USSR Expenditures & Development]



### What Each Side [Excludes Research



### Buys with Its Money & Development]



The strategic offense mission is defined according to the *US Defense Planning and Programming Categories* of November 1978 with minor adjustments to attain comparability. Costs for pensions, nuclear materials for warheads, and RDT&E are excluded.

Source: Adapted from DoD *Annual Report*, FY79, and CIA SR 79 10004, and US Budget, FY80.